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Why sanctions aren't the answer

Larry Everest

The argument that sanctions -- not war -- are the way to bring down bloody dictators has gained wide acceptance among peace activists. Yet far from being a weapon for peace, sanctions are a weapon for war, often less discriminating than bombing.

Before last year's Gulf war, many in the anti-war movement endorsed sanctions as a "humane alternative" to military confrontation. Today an estimated one million Iraqi children are malnourished as a result of both sanctions and wartime destruction. Greenpeace estimates that 70,000 Iraqi civilians have died from starvation and disease since the fighting ended. That's 10 times more non-combatants than lost their lives during the war itself, and more are dying daily.

Iraq isn't the only country where US-sponsored sanctions are taking a human toll. Last October an embargo was imposed on Haiti following the anti-Aristide coup; now fuel is scarce, malnutrition is even more widespread than before, and thousands are desperately trying to flee. In the 1970s and 1980s sanctions against South Africa were widely supported by Western activists and the ANC. During the Gulf war many activists viewed sanctions as a reasonable middle ground between total war and non-intervention -- a way to get Iraq out of Kuwait without bloodshed. Today sanctions are the weapon of choice of President Bush's New World Order to force compliance from upstart regimes. The UN may soon threaten both Libya and North Korea with sanctions, and the US is considering intensifying the economic boycott of Cuba.

The events of the past year highlight the problems with this approach. To begin with, sanctions aren't humane. They are especially deadly for a semi-industrialized country like Iraq, which depends on imports for everything from food to medicines to essential machinery (a dependence deliberately heightened by the bombing of Iraq's infrastructure).

Today many Third World countries are increasingly dependent upon imports for the basic necessities of life. Haiti imports 80 percent of its food. In 1960, for example, the Middle East was a net exporter of food; by 1981, it was buying nearly 40 percent of all Third World food imports. Today, Oman imports 90 percent of its food; Iraq and Libya import 70 percent of theirs, Egypt and Tunisia 50 percent. Sanctions can be a far less discriminating weapon than even bombs. Food and medicine may officially be exempted from an embargo (as is the case with Iraq), but without export earnings, sanctioned countries don't have the money to buy them. The primary victims end up being civilians, while the impact on the ruling group is minimal.

Nor are sanctions ever an alternative to war. As Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell admitted in the case of Iraq, "sanctions and war were a seamless process." They served to soften up Iraq, buy time for the Allied military buildup and convince the world that the coalition had gone the last mile for peace (even after the decision to strike had secretly been made).

In the case of South Africa, peace activists saw sanctions as a means of waging non-violent warfare to bring down the apartheid regime. But the US government, when it finally came around to accepting sanctions, viewed them only as a way to push for certain reforms. And in the end, US sanctions (which cost the South African economy an estimated $30 to $40 billion during the 1980s) were never as airtight or comprehensive as those imposed on Iraq.

Many progressives, both Haitian and American, supported the embargo against Haiti. Yet according to Haitian activists, the embargo has been enforced selectively by the U.S. as a means to pressure not just the military junta but Aristide himself to moderate his demands. Haitians have expressed their readiness to sacrifice for liberation, but hardly to further U.S. goals.

The lesson is that it's impossible to see sanctions as a non-violent means of warfare against abusive regimes. Even in cases where governments accede to peace activists' demands to impose sanctions, they will use them only to further their own agendas. The legacy of the Gulf war is now clear: Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and bully, but U.S. intervention has proven to be a greater evil for the people. This is powerful testimony that peace activists should oppose any foreign intervention by the U.S. government, whether it's direct military involvement or selective use of sanctions. A great place to start is demanding the immediate and complete lifting of sanctions on Iraq, and calling for an end to their use against other Third World countries.

© PNS. Larry Everest, a journalist who has traveled widely in the Middle East and South Asia, is author of Behind the Poison Cloud: Union Carbide's Bhopal Massacre

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Editor: Sam Smith
The Progressive Review
1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009
202-232-5544
Fax Nbr: 202-234-6222
Compuserve ID: 72067,1525
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Gateway address from Internet, Bitnet:
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Tsonganomics: capitalism without pain

At times, Paul Tsongas sounds like a Polish proto-capitalist who's been hanging out too much with experts from the Harvard Business School. The difference is, of course, that Tsongas has lived under capitalism all his life and thus can not be so easily excused for his panglossian approach to the subject.

Because Tsongas is likable, intelligent and compassionate on most social issues, you wonder whether he hasn't adopted his role as a defender of corporate America as an exceedingly clever gimmick to tide him through the election, a shield against attacks on his underlying liberalism. Perhaps, safely in the White House, he will revert to a record that as least as late as 1984 was barely indistinguishable from that of Tom Harkin.

Let us, for example, imagine Tsongas is elected, the economy is still on the ropes, and Tom Harkin introduces a bill providing for massive public works spending.

Tsongas has made it clear that he thinks factories and not bridges are the answer. He argues correctly that when the bridge is finished the bridgeworker's job is finished as well. Further the bridge is paid for out of borrowed money that will add to our children's debt. He'd rather see the money go to encouraging the opening of a new high tech factory which will provide jobs for the indefinite future.

What Tsongas doesn't say is that the bridge may -- like so many bridges in this country -- need replacement or extensive repair, that his new techno-factory may need the bridge to get its workers to the job, that pumping money into public works has been shown empirically to work well, that public investment spurs private investment and that we can get the bridge going a hell of a lot faster than we can get his techno-factory on line. Nor, most importantly, does he publicly acknowledge that the bridge and the factory need not be mutually exclusive activities.

Now the Democrats in Congress like the Harkin bill and pass it. It goes to President Tsongas's desk. Does he sign it or not? If we can find the answer to that question we will have a much clearer idea of how much concern we should have about Tsongas's economic theories.

Political campaigns tend not to shed much light on such questions. The candidates, forced to distinguish themselves from their opposition, tend to exaggerate their unwillingness to compromise, constructing imaginary Maginot lines where, in reality, there is only their druthers. (An exception in this campaign has been Clinton, who attempts to embrace all his opponents ideas, even if contradictory, a move which has the advantage of filling the substantial voids in his own program).

But the guy keeps telling us to take him at his word, and his word is that of an unreconstructed trickle-downer, bad enough coming in 1980, but virtually indefensible after 12 years of trickle-down that have left the economy drip dried and dehydrated.

To be sure, Tsongas argues that Reagan and Bush didn't do it right, but it is hard to grasp what would be dramatically different except for the implicitly stated virtue that Tsongas rather then they would be in charge. He would know how to target capital gains cuts; they didn't. He would know which anti-trust laws to scrap; they didn't. And so forth.

Let us stipulate that under Tsongas, all the right economic decisions would be made, that he would apply just the right amount of pressure to corporate America at just the right time, and that business would respond favorably to his every reasoned pleading. The problem is that we should be building an economy that will work reasonably well even without the guidance of Paul Tsongas. And this is not the one that Tsongas proposes.

He doesn't, for starters, describe the American economy as it is or could be. He speaks of rebuilding our manufacturing "base." But this is more a nostalgic than a realistic theme. The reality is, for example, that the sports industry in this country is almost as big as the automobile manufacturing industry. And it is hard to see how we could reverse the global transfer of manufacturing jobs absent UN sanctions against any country whose workers are not represented by the UAW and ILGWU. A few days before the New Hampshire primary, a factory in that state closed down, throwing 250 workers on to the streets. The factory

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was moving to Mexico and cheaper labor.

Tsongas suggests that anti-trust laws are outmoded. He proposes that some of these be scrapped to allow American businesses to join together in research and development to meet foreign competition. Yet, we have just been through the greatest period of corporate conglomeration since the 1890s, with little to show for it except an even more marked decline in American competitiveness. Certainly exempting newspapers from the anti-trust laws has produced nothing except more arrogant editors and fewer, worse and less responsive newspapers that are financially more resistant to challenge by the very venture capitalists that Tsongas extols.

Even if there is some virtue in relaxing certain anti-trust laws, manufacturers might first be required to take advantage of the patents they have acquired over the years and then suppressed. Much of the research needed for a more competitive automobile industry, for example, is probably to be found in that industry's own patent files. Use-it-or-lose-it patent legislation should at least be tried before we scrap some of the most important economic laws on the books.

Tsongas also fails to make a clear distinction between the valid needs of small business and the invalid greed of large corporations. The former institutions provide most of the new jobs in this country; the latter much of the economic torpor, political corruption and environmental degradation. While it is true that Democrats, like Republicans, have failed to provide the sort of support the former institutions require, it is also true that both parties are wholly owned subsidiaries of the latter. By failing to deal with this issue, Tsongas either unintentionally or cynically wraps Dow Corning in the worthy mantle of Lowell MicroGidgets with the end result that his "economic truths" become distortion by omission.

(Tsongas, it should be noted, is not above the same sort of hyperbole for which he has taken some of his opponents to task. His claim that he would move power utilities toward sounder environmental policies by threatening them with lower rates of return falls on the simple fact that these rates are set by state utility commissions and not by the President of the United States.)

Tsongas is not alone in wanting to steer this country towards economic rule by oligopolies under the supreme guidance of the state, he is not alone in forgetting that it was the fascists and not the Japanese who invented the corporate state, and he is not alone in refusing to address the social problems such a system entails. But he has made it a cornerstone of his campaign and he needs to explain far better how, under his rules, economic democracy would be protected and how, in our efforts to emulate the Japanese we won't end up, either by accident or design, with a society much closer to that, say, of Mussolini's Italy.

This is not a rhetorical criticism as those who have had to deal with the state-protected nuclear industry can testify. This industry has done its mischief under cover of secrecy and color of national interest and those who have opposed it have found themselves not only bucking the system but defying "national security" as well.

It is no economic "truth" to declare that corporate America and the public are on "the same team." It is no economic "truth" to propose "using market forces to deliver the best quality health care at the best price." Tsongas declines to talk about the fact that the goals and interests of corporate America are often at odds with the goals and interests of the American people. It is this conflict that anti-trust laws, the minimum wage, environmental regulations, health & safety rules, the FDA, FAA and numerous other agencies and requirements -- based on liberal and progressive economics -- were designed to resolve. To the extent that capitalism has worked in this country, it has done so not because our governments have said they were "pro-business" but because they have acted like they were pro-people.

By all accounts, Tsongas is a compassionate, reasonable, democratic individual. The problem is that this is an atypical description of a US president. If there is one blessing of the last 12 years, it is that previous administrations provided us with enough protection against corporate rapaciousness that not even Reagan Bush could undo it all. One can't listen to Tsongas without a sense that he is asking us, now that he is on the scene, to throw away the smoke alarms of our economy. We know he would keep a good eye on the place, but what happens when he's gone?- *Sam Smith*

Truth in rowing

I had a dream the other night. I was rowing, rowing, rowing. In Paul Tsongas's big new American rowboat. I was pulling my weight. I was part of the team. I felt good.

Paul was in the bow holding a seven hour meeting with a Federal Environmental Regulatory Commissioner trying to settle a few minor details about a new pipeline he wanted to get built.

I kept rowing. Feeling a little tired, I asked one of the men in the stern, the CEO of a major corporation, whether he could spell me. He explained that he only had management skills; he didn't know how to row. So I kept rowing.

I asked the lawyer but he said that his role was to advise rowboat owners on the legal aspects of rowing. Besides, he didn't know how to row. So I kept on rowing.

By this time my hands were beginning to blister, so I asked the doctor for some salve. He asked me whether I had health insurance. I didn't, so I kept on rowing.

Sitting next to the doctor was a marketing consultant. He didn't know how to row either, but said that with his talents and my rowing ability he could come up with a very marketable deal.

There was only one other person in the boat, a venture capitalist, but he also declined because the market forces weren't quite right.

In desperation I turned to Paul, but he explained that he was a presidential candidate and presidential candidates only explained *how* to row.

So I stopped, rowing, lifted the oars out of the oarlocks, and stood up with them.

Paul paused in his lobbying and said, "Now let's have some economic truths. We are all the same team. We won't get anywhere bashing each other. Sit down and row."

So I did. But first I grabbed the only life jacket and put it on. Damned if I was going to tell them about the leak under my feet.

The boat was sinking, I was tired. It was time to wake up.--*S.S.*

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Strengths & Weaknesses of the Democratic Candidates

This chart points out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the five leading Democratic candidates. It deals with only those issues where there is an identifiable difference between them. For example, there are no anti-choice candidates. Similarly their positions on civil rights are (on the rare occasions that they are mentioned) are compassionate and unspecific. The score at the bottom is not a rating of the candidates, since obviously some issues are more important than others.

ISSUES	Brown	Clinton	Harkin	Kerrey	Tsongas	Notes
AIDS	+					Most of the candidates act like we didn't have an AIDS epidemic
Campaign reform	+					Brown is way ahead of the other candidates on this one
Capital punishment	+	-	+	-	-	
Corruption of political system	+					Brown has made this issue a major one in his campaign.
Constitutional government	+					Brown is the only candidate who understands the erosion of constitutional government and would do something about it
Decentralization of government				+		Kerrey, although he speaks softly on the subject, seems to have the greatest desire to have decisions made at the lowest possible level
Domestic economy	+		+		-	Tsongas's economics is nice Reaganism; Brown and Harkin are the best alternative here
Drugs			-	-	-	No one has dared proposed an alternative to the war on drugs; Kerrey, Tsongas and Harkin have contributed redundant machismo to the issue
Environment	+					

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ISSUES	Brown	Clinton	Harkin	Kerrey	Tsongas	Notes
Higher education		+		+	+	Clinton, Kerrey & Tsongas have the best college loan programs
General intelligence	+				+	
Health care	+			+		Brown and Kerrey favor national health isurance; the rest favor further tinkering with America's jury rigged, failed system
Integrity		-			+	Clinton's politics are driven by what's best for Clinton; his sex and draft problems merely symbolize his underlying opportunism
Labor			+		-	Harkin has the best record on labor issues; Tsongas opposes striker replacement legislation
Liveability (could you stand having the guy around for four years?)	-	+	-		+	Harkin and Brown grate on you early. Clinton's blarney at least goes down easily. Tsongas's score could go down if he starts to get testy with us.
Middle East			-			Harkin has been the most knee-jerk supporter of the Shamir government
Public schools	-	-	-	+	-	The real issue is federal intrusion into local schools e.g. national standards and tests. Kerrey's education plank helps the schools but avoids federal intrusion
Taxes	+		+			Brown has proposed a radically new approach to taxation. Brown's flat tax is the most important undiscussed new issue of the year.
Trade			+			Harkin would probably be our toughest trade negotiator. We could use it.
WYSIWYG (Computerese for what you see is what you get)		-			+	Clinton tries too hard to please everybody; Tsongas is one of the least artificial candidates in years.
Score (+/-)	10/2	2/4	5/4	4/2	5/5	

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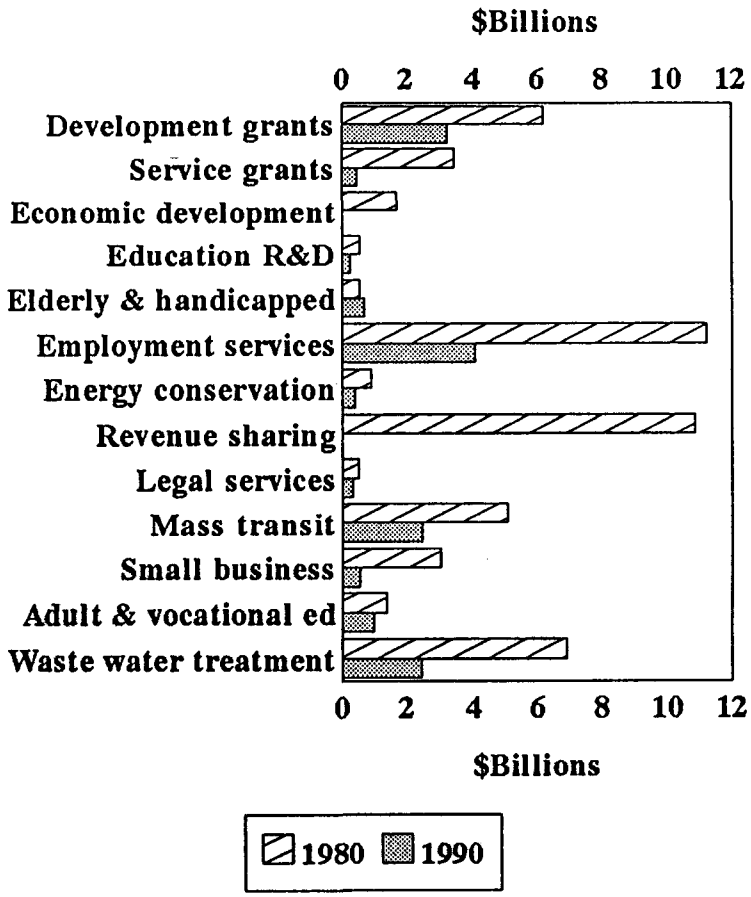
Starving Local Government

Federal Spending 1980 & 1990 for States and Localities



Source: Institute for Policy Studies & National Priorities Project

The Weather Report

Just politics

About this "failed policies of the past" thing: it helps to keep in mind that the last time we had a real liberal in the White House was during Lyndon Johnson's first term. Any failures over the past quarter decade have been the product of conservative and middle of the road administrations. Despite what you hear from pundits and politicians of the extremist middle and right, it didn't happen on our watch.

The major media blacked out a second alleged sex scandal involving Bill Clinton that broke in a supermarket tabloid just days before the New Hampshire primary. The story, in the *Globe,* charged that Clinton had a relationship with a woman who claimed that Clinton was the father of her child. The woman also told of supposed group sex sessions with Clinton.

The story had been circulating in Washington well before the *Globe* piece appeared, as have other tales of Clinton's sexual eclecticism. According to Cindy Adams of the *New York Post,* that paper has received numerous letters from women with stories about Clinton the paper is checking out. Yet thanks to the selective priggishness of the media, that portion of the public not inclined towards checkout counter voyeurism has been given the impression that charges of Clinton's sexual escapades have revolved around a single affair.

The irony of this is now that the Clinton sex story has been driven underground, the only thing that will disappear will be the facts. The tales will still circulate and be far more subject to distortion than if the media had overcome its self-righteousness and treated the matter the way journalists would have before they became secular theologians. Having made the decision that the story is not relevant, the mainstream media will offer us no assistance in evaluating it. For example, Clinton's latest accuser is said to have passed a lie detector test. Is this true? Who gave the test? Why did she come forward now?

As it is, the story will simply bypass the mainstream media, cropping up perhaps (if Clinton is nominated) in GOP campaign ad innuendo and carefully targeted direct mail pieces the press won't even find out about. It's hard to see how this is better way of doing things.

Meanwhile, the *Washington Times* notes correctly that Clinton's first sex scandal got dramatically kinder treatment from the media than similar stories involving others.

The Clinton story was handled gingerly and sparsely by such major papers as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, neither of which ran the revealing transcript of the phone tapes between Clinton and Gennifer Flowers. Within a week, the story virtually disappeared from the mainstream press.

In contrast, the 1980 story about Dan Quayle sharing a Florida cottage with Paula Parkinson and several other members of Congress was the topic of 11 stories in the *New York Times* and 16 in the *Washington Post* all in one week. During the same period, the major networks ran 13 stories.

When John Tower was nominated to be Secretary of Defense, the networks ran 32 stories concerning Towers's alleged sexual improprieties. The *Washington Post* ran a story by Bob Woodward that accused Tower of having "appeared to be drunk" during two visits to a Texas Air Force base and having fondled two women. The source for this story was a former Air Force sergeant, who was presumably more reliable than, say, a former cabaret singer.

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During the 9 days before the Senate voted to confirm Clarence Thomas, the networks ran 99 stories about Anita Hill's allegations, the *New York Times* ran 63 and the *Post* 61.

Clinton's troubles are not limited to the draft and diddling. Alexander Cockburn, in the February 24 *Nation,* described in detail a Contra-related operation with ties right to the Arkansas governor's mansion.

Too complex to describe here, suffice it to say that Clinton's chief of security, Buddy Young, is a far more interesting story than Gennifer Flowers. That's not to say they're not related. Another Contra aficionado, Larry Nichols, was also on the governor's payroll. This is the guy who initially blew the whistle on the Clinton-Flowers affair. The fact that he was fired has been mentioned in the mainstream press; what hasn't been mentioned is why. He was fired only after a reporter discovered his Contra connection. According to Cockburn, Nichols recanted his Flowers story one night before Clinton's appearance on *Sixty Minutes* -- after a strong-arming phone call from Buddy Young.

Clinton's Contra connection is a must for any self-respecting metropolitan daily. It is also further warning to the so-called professionals in the Democratic Party that if they continue to hitch their wagon to the Clinton star they could be in big trouble.

On the other hand, Mark Sherman of the *Atlanta Constitution,* notes that Grover Cleveland was elected president despite the campaign taunt "Ma, Ma, where's my pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha" -- and despite the fact that he had avoided service in the Union Army.

Tsongas has been taking his pro-business policy seriously. His lobbying record includes representing a pipe line opposed by environmentalists, a $3000 a month retainer from Drexel Burnham Lambert to "introduce" the firm "to various state and local officials" and work for the American Insurance Association who, like Tsongas, oppose national health insurance.

Gary Lee of the *Washington Post* notes that Tsongas kept careful records of his activities, unlike some of his lobbying peers. This is how we know about the 7-hour meeting with a federal energy regulatory commissioner over a pipeline matter. This little incident, though minor, is revealing of the way business works in Washington. How many environmentalists get seven hour meetings with a FERC commissioner?

After several months there is still grounds for confusion as to where Bob Kerrey stands. He volunteered for Vietnam, leading one New Hampshire Democrat to tell the *Washington Post* that "I was horrified to hear [that]. All my friends were doing what Clinton did." Then after being wounded, he returned and spoke out against the conflict. Now Kerrey says, "The cold warriors have done their job and achieved magnificent results." Hey, weren't those the guys who thought up Vietnam?

The latest issue of the *Quayle Quarterly* lists just a few of our vice president's achievements as chair of the White House "Competitiveness Council:"

- Worked to remove protection from millions of acres of wetlands.
- Weakened Clean Air Act regulations.
- Jeopardized health and safety standards for new drugs.
- Gutted a recycling requirement for incinerators.
- Fought a ban on burning of lead acid batteries.
- Weakened nutrition labeling regulations.
- Helped weaken airplane noise reduction standards.
- Delayed new quality standards for medical laboratories.
- Proposed changes to make it difficult for victims of unsafe products to recover losses.
- Opposed legislation that would tighten auto fuel economy standards

Speaking of Quayle, *Fortune* reports a 67-year-old male has only a one in six chance of dying before January 20, 1997. Sort of like Russian roulette.

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It is more encouraging to note, however, that the *National Enquirer's* panel of top ten psychics has predicted that Quayle will set "the White House on fire when he accidentally knocks over a candelabra at an official state function."

The city council of Takoma Park, MD, has voted to allow any of its residents -- even if not US citizens -- to vote in its elections.

A new book, *Double Cross,* claims that Marilyn Monroe was murdered by the mob in a hit set up to occur just hours after Bobby Kennedy visited Monroe. Sam Giancana, the book argues, sought to have Kennedy linked to Monroe's death. Meanwhile, a former prosecutor in the case claims that his superiors ignored evidence that Monroe may not have taken her own life.

Doonsbury has ran a number of Bush's strange statements of late, but the *Miami Herald* ran a full story by Martin Merzer that suggested a link between Halcion, the president's drug of choice, and his incoherence. Merzer quoted Dr. Sidney Wolfe of the Public Citizen's Health Research Group as saying: "It is extremely worrisome that the president is on this drug or would be on any other drug that can have such severe effects on his ability to remember or to think. The drug is not consistent with responsible governing of the nation, a state, a city or other body."

Among the examples of strange Bushspeak Merzer cited were these:

- About illicit drugs: "Where we're hurting as a society is the 35 and older, kind of the addicted crowd is not shaking it."
- About his illness in Japan: "Everybody is talking about Barbara, we miss her very, very much. . . And I told her I didn't need her, I was not going to throw up. . . And I'd like a loan because it costs a lot of dry clean a suit over there in Japan, and the prime minister had a nice expensive one."

Of course, if Bush is lost for words, there's always Dan Quayle. Here's what he said the other day in New Hampshire, according to the *New York Times:*

We are leaders of the world of the space program. We have been the leaders of the world of our... of the space program and we're going to continue where we're going to go, notwithstanding the Soviet Union's demise and collapse - the former Soviet Union - we now have independent republics which used to be called the Soviet Union. Space is the next frontier to be explored. And we're going to explore. Think of all things we rely upon in space today: Communications from... Japan, detection of potential ballistic missile attacks. Ballistic missiles are still here. Other nations do have ballistic missiles. How do you think we were able to detect some of the Scud missiles and things like that? Space, reconnaissance, weather, communications --- you name it. We use space a lot today."

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Alexander Hamilton's advice to the cops

From Alexander Hamilton's charge to officers of the Revenue Marine, later the US Coast Guard:

While I recommend in the strongest terms to the respective officers, activity, vigilance and firmness, I feel no less solicitude that their deportment may be marked with prudence, moderation and good temper. Upon these last qualities, not less than the former, must depend the success, usefulness and consequently continuance of the establishment in which they are included. They cannot be insensible that there are some prepossessions against it, that the charge with which they are entrusted is a delicate one, and that it is easy by mismanagement to produce serious and extensive clamour, disgust and alarm.

They will keep in mind that their countrymen are freemen, and, as such, are impatient of everything that bears the least mark of domineering sprit. They will, therefore, refrain, with the most guarded circumspection, from whatever has the semblance of hautiness, rudeness or insult. If obstacles occur, they will remember that they are under the particular protection of the laws and that they can meet with nothing disagreeable in the execution of their duty which these will not severely reprehend. This reflection, and regard to the good of the service, will prevent at all times a spirit of irritation or resentment. They will endeavor to overcome difficulties if any are experienced, by a cool and temperate perseverance in their duty -- by address and moderation, rather than by vehemence and violence. The former style of conduct will recommend them to the particular approbation of the President of the United States, while the reverse of it -- even a single instance of outrage or intemperate or improper treatment of any person with whom they have anything to do, in the course of their duty -- will meet with his pointed displeasure, and will be attended with correspondent consequences.

Land of the free

State and federal agents seized petitions for a jury rights ballot initiative and for the recall of Alaska's governor in a February drug raid in Palmer. The petitions were listed in a group of seized items the police labeled "Miscellaneous: anti-drug war attitude." The police also seized videotapes of the PBS series "America's Drug Forum" and books checked out from local libraries. At last report, the police had refused to release the petitions even though the initiative deadline was less than a month away. Says Alaska Libertarian Party vice chair Len Karpinski, "What on God's green earth gives them the right to confiscate a legal, state-approved petition?"

Candidates for state office in Georgia must now take a urine test.

Witchhunters from the US Senate have subpoenaed three journalists to find out who leaked the media information about Anita Hill's revelations concerning Clarence Thomas. Timothy Phelps of *Newsday*, the first reporter called by the snoops, spent four hours refusing to answer unconstitutional questions. Phelps said that the Senate's chief inquisitor, Peter Flemming, "went over every word that I wrote, virtually" in his story and also asked about "public statements that I made after the fact."

A Brooklyn federal judge lessened the sentence of a convicted gun runner after a letter from the chief counsel of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who said Dick Stoffberg had cooperated in that body's initial investigation of the October Surprise. The counsel, R. Spencer Oliver, said that "although Mr. Stoffberg's cooperation may not lead to any criminal action, the information which he has voluntarily provided to us has already been helpful and, to some extent, has been corroborated by other evidence." This story, untouched by the major media, is significant, the *Village Voice* points out, not just because of its intimation of progress on the October Surprise case, but because "it appears to be the first instance in history that cooperation with a non criminal congressional inquiry has been used to amend a federal criminal sentence."

The mediacracy

The media, which has ignored candidates like Larry Agran and Eugene McCarthy because they are "minor," has no such inhibitions about David Duke. As of the end of January, Duke, even with the media's constant fondling, was getting no more than 3 percent in the national polls.

A question about "unsubstantiated allegations." If an allegation were substantiated, would it still be an allegation? Also: why do journalists only use the phrase when writing about crime or sex and never, say, when quoting a White House news conference or State of the Union address.

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Feedback

Here we are, busy trying to save the Republic, and what does Bob Levey of the *Washington Post* do? He actually investigates the story of the $250 Neiman-Marcus chocolate chip cookies we ran last month. According to Levey, it just isn't so -- only another piece of American folklore that has cropped up in various forms over the years. Our apologies to NM. As an editor once said, many a good story is ruined by over verification.

On the other hand, something we said probably *wasn't* going to happen next month actually did. The House voted to launch an inquiry into the October Surprise -- spurred on by a last minute plea by fifteen ex-hostages, including some who think there's nothing to the story.

Drug busts

At least four Maine towns will have ballot questions this year that propose legalizing the cultivation and possession of up to two pounds of marijuana. The moves came after numerous Maine communities last summer became the targets of low-level helicopter surveillance, and following revelations of alleged abuses by the state's drug enforcement agency. In one of the instances that came before the state legislature, a Searsport couple told of drug agents using information gathered from an 11-year-old girl during a school-based drug education program. The information led to marijuana charges against her parents.

In a letter to the *Nation,* Richard A. Mugalian has raised the key question about the Noriega trial: "the legality of a US prosecution of a foreign national for violation of US law based on acts and omissions taking place on foreign soil? . . . These principles would justify kidnapping George Bush for trial in Iran for violation of fundamentalist Muslim Iranian law."

Road signs

• Sixty percent of all US households failed to purchase a single book last year, according to *The Nation.*

Beam me up, Jerry

Progressive candidates have done poorly so far this election season, but progressive ideas have done surprisingly well. Two of the five leading candidates have endorsed national health insurance, three have urged college loans for everyone, and a few candidates have even suggested that Americans have rights beyond those listed in the Constitution. As one analyst noted, the field -- on average -- is considerably more liberal than in 1988.

On the other hand, two of the three most progressive candidates -- Agran and McCarthy -- were thoroughly blitzed in New Hampshire (with no little help from a media blackout on their campaigns).

As can be seen by our scorecard in this issue, that leaves us with Jerry Brown. Jerry Brown is not the warmest or most captivating messenger the progressive cause might have, but he is smart, imaginative, courageous and right on a long list of issues. He has his eccentric side, but he is not -- nor was he ever -- Governor Moonbeam. Even the columnist who dubbed him that has recanted. Whatever his faults, California was better off after his administration than, say, Arkansas has been under the guidance of Bill Clinton.

Further, even the corporate media has had to admit that he has had an impact on this campaign. He has not only been right, he has been smart. And because he has, he has helped the progressive cause.

Consider this: as we went to press, Brown had raised pledges from over 100,000 contributors. 65,000 more than Tom Harkin, the candidate with the second broadest base of financial support, and 80,000 more than Clinton. Brown is clearly doing more than running a campaign, he is trying to create a movement.

Jerry Brown is the only progressive who has come up with an idea of what to do this season that shows real potential of having an impact on America's political course. We can carp at his failings, discuss how it should have been done, try to really like the front-runners, blame the media, or hide in the weeds. Your editor has done all these things, but has finally come to the conclusion that it would be more fruitful to give the guy a hand. Beam me up, Jerry. --*Sam Smith*

• According to *Social Issues Digest,* if the personal tax exemption of 1948 had kept place with inflation, it would be worth $6300 today instead of $2050.

The idea mill

Jerry Brown's proposal for a flat tax may strike some as regressive, but that is not necessarily so. To understand this, consider a flat tax of 13% in which the first $15,000 is exempted, as proposed by Mark Satin of *New Options.* Here are the effective tax rates at different income levels:

$15,000	0%
$25,000	5%
$50,000	9%
$75,000	10%
$100,000	11%
$150,000	12%
$200,000	13%

While Brown's proposal is not that simple -- he would allow a few deductions such as home mortgages, rent and charitable contributions -- the effect would be somewhat similar but less predictable. In addition, Brown's proposal would do away with the highly regressive social security tax and the at least arguably regressive corporate tax, which even some liberal economists like Lester Thurow believe is really a hidden sales tax. To figure out how you would do under Brown's proposal, subtract your mortgage, rent, charitable giving and social security costs from your total income and multiple by 13%. Chances are you'll save and there's a dead certainty that the month before April 15 will be a lot more pleasant.

Daisy Alexander is a retiree from Montclair, New Jersey, and Pepe is a recent immigrant from Havana, Cuba. They both live in a low-income senior housing development section of Miami, Florida. At first glance, Daisy and Pepe seem to have little in common. But they are bound to each other -- in

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friendship and through the common bonds of a new economic system called time dollars or service credits.

Time dollars are explained in a new book, *Time Dollars: A Currency for the 90'S, Deposit Time, Withdraw What You Need* by Edgar Cahn and Jonathan Rowe (Rodale Press, Hardcover $19.95,)

The system operates like a blood bank. People help others in their community and get credits in a computer bank that they can draw upon in times of need. Cahn and Rowe describe how time dollars have transformed over 100 communities and how grass-roots groups built the new currency.

Here's how it works for Daisy and Pepe: Daisy volunteers three days a week tutoring first graders at the elementary school across the street from her home. Every week Pepe comes to her house and takes her grocery shopping. An amputee with a cane, Daisy is dependent on Pepe to provide this service for her. But no money changes hands. Daisy simply "cashes in" the time dollars she earns tutoring to "pay" for Pepe's shopping help. In turn Pepe earns time dollars to buy services he needs. But Daisy and Pepe gain in other ways as well. Both are renewed and enthused about the opportunity for helping, and inspired by the social activities that the sense of community has produced.

"The potential benefits of the time dollars concept are limitless. It can touch every life in every community, ranging from an apartment complex to an entire nation, every facility, from a nursing home to a university campus," says author Cahn. "It fosters a sense of financial independence, camaraderie, community spirit, harmony among age groups, races, religions, income levels, and even political adversaries."

The book responds to criticism of the concept point by point and gives detailed advice and organizational templates for getting a time dollar program going in your community. This is an important new book for every person involved in social service or community organizing. It wouldn't be a bad idea to send Boris Yeltsin a copy, too.

Furthermore. . .

Among the Cold War effluvia that is seeping into the prints now that it's over, is the fact that we've been spending $17 billion a year to defend northern Norway. Says Rep. Barney Frank, for $17 billion the American people deserve at least to defend *all* of Norway. The Norwegians have been spending about $4 billion annually.

Field notes

Vietnam Veterans Against the War will be observing its 25th anniversary May 29-30 in NYC. The event will include a concert by Country Joe McDonald. [VVAW, PO Box 74, Brooklyn NY 11215]

Detroit Summer '92: The national Greens have issued a call to young people to spend two weeks in Detroit this summer working with citizen organizations in a variety of community activities including rebuilding homes,, planting urban gardens, marching on crack houses, and reclaiming neighborhoods. [Detroit Summer '92, PO Box 07313, Detroit, MI 48207.

Greens paraphernalia: The Greens are now selling buttons and T-shirts as well as Green organizing kits and information. [The Greens Clearinghouse, PO Box 30208, Kansas City, MO 64112, 816-931-9366.

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1739 Connecticut Ave NW
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